



Iraqi Army soldiers and police officers prepare for a large-scale operation to simultaneously raid 16 targets in search of insurgents in the Adhamiyah area of Baghdad, Iraq, 3 June 2006. (US Navy Photo by Photographer's Mate 1st Class Bart A. Bauer, Combat Camera Group Pacific)

The MiTT and Its “Human Terrain”

Transitioning the Iraqi Army into the Lead

It's your first day with your Iraqi Army (IA) unit as part of a military transition team (MiTT), and you have no idea what to expect. Upon arriving at the combat outpost, the first thing you see is a shell of an unfinished building with a puddle of sewage in front and a pile of garbage 150 meters from the building's entrance. Flies are an issue—and it does not smell so good either.

At first blush, the IA operations do not impress you either—operations are quickly planned and top-fed. Iraqi Soldiers often roll out in a mix of uniforms, some with helmets or body armor but

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others without.

You spend your first week running around telling Soldiers to put on their helmets and clean up. One day you realize that this strategy is not working. Not only is no one listening to you, but also you have failed to build any rapport with your IA unit. Then it hits you: you are not here to make this into an American

unit—you are here to help this unit become the best Iraqi unit it can be.

You have just made your first step toward understanding your MiTT role in mentoring and coaching the IA.

Although this scenario is not unique, for some American Soldiers on Iraqi (or Afghan) MiTTs or police, border patrol or national guard transition teams, the circumstances may not be as grim. Regardless, American Soldiers approach military service from a different perspective than the average Iraqi Soldiers. To be successful, you must understand the Iraqi perspective, bearing in mind

that you want the same thing: a strong IA prepared to secure and protect Iraq so US troops can go home.

This article is based on our experiences mentoring and coaching both an IA battalion and the Iraqi police that the IA operates with to improve security in Mosul, Iraq. The article presents a few ideas about fostering teamwork within the human terrain in Mosul. This is by no means an attempt to discuss all the cultural differences between US Soldiers and the Middle Eastern Soldiers and policemen. Whether you are reading this article as part of the Coalition Force, a MiTT or military police (MP), the goal is the same—to build cooperation between the IA and Iraqi police to provide security to Iraq.

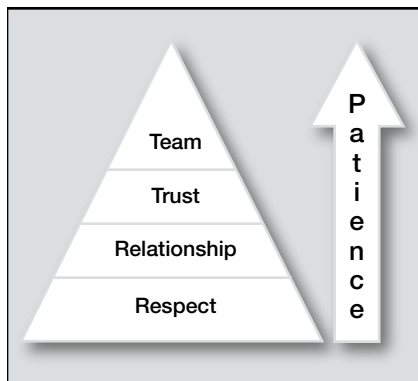
Meeting Expectations. If you are part of a MiTT in Iraq today, the process of transitioning the IA into the lead while working with its Iraqi police counterparts can be confusing and frustrating. The cause of this confusion can be traced to preconceived notions about how army and police units should act and be developed plus how the US Army measures success. These notions come from your experiences as US Soldiers, and you can't help but apply them when working with the Iraqis.

The trick is to understand what you are expected to accomplish and what you are *not* expected to change. Armed with this understanding, you can help the Iraqis fashion their army and police into the forces necessary to protect this fledgling democracy.

What are you expected to accomplish? You must help the IA and police become strong enough to beat the insurgency and sustain security in their country. What are you not expected to change? You can't (and would not want to) change the culture and social mores in Iraq. The bottom line, whether you embrace it or not, is that a uniquely IA and Iraqi police will be the result of your mentoring and coaching.

But before you can build a team, you must understand who the players are and how they interact within this human terrain.

Human Terrain System. According to Dr. Montgomery McFate and Andrea Jackson, the human terrain system is "the social, ethnographic, cultural, economic and political elements of the people among whom a force is operating." (See the article "An Organizational Solution for DoD's Cultural Knowledge Needs" in *Military Review*, July-August



This figure shows the process for building a relationship that, ultimately, builds a team.

2005 edition.)

Here are the players for your team.

Iraqi Army. The IA consists of leaders who may have served in the former regime's army or in the Peshmurga (in Kurdish units). The background of these leaders will influence how their units operate (doctrine, loyalties, sectarian influences, etc.). Often these units do not trust the Iraqi police and may view the MiTT or other Coalition Forces as having ulterior motives.

MiTTs. These are teams of 10 to 12 Soldiers assembled from across the US Army and, after a two-month train-up, assigned to IA units. They must support themselves while advising the IA units often away from Coalition forward operating bases (FOBs). Their primary purpose is to help the IA take the lead and support the IA with Coalition Force effects. (For more information about MiTT operations and organization, see the article "So You are Going to Be on a MiTT. What Do You Need to Know?" by Captain Jared R. Kite, et al, in the November-December 2006 edition.)

Coalition Forces. These may be American units often on their second tour in country. Our MiTT in Mosul was partnered with a Stryker company, consisting of four platoons and a company headquarters. Two of the Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) 13F Fire Support Specialist Soldiers from this company were attached to the MiTT to bring it up to 12 men.

The Stryker company's leadership had served in the same area of Mosul 18 months earlier and had a thorough understanding of the city and its people. Although this repetitive assignment in the same area of operations (AO) in Iraq may not be replicated everywhere in theater, it's a reasonable assumption that the US Army or Marine Corps brigade you are working with will have been

in Iraq before.

Fostering a win-win relationship between the MiTT and the Stryker company commander is key to the success of the mission. The Coalition Force can't accomplish the mission without the MiTT, and the MiTT can't be successful in its foreign internal defense mission without the Coalition Force—this must be a team effort.

Iraqi Police. The long-term goal is to get the IA out of internal matters and focused on external threats to Iraq. Until the police force is strong enough (manned, equipped and trained properly), Iraqi civilian leaders will continue to rely on the IA to provide tactical over watch in the cities.

Ideally, the IA battalion is partnered with an Iraqi police district that has an officer-in-charge (OIC) comparable to the rank to the IA OIC, but this is not always the case. It is important that these two commanders (IA and Iraqi police) have as open a relationship as possible. If critical information sharing is to take place, these two men must trust one another and work closely with each other's organizations. A key metric of success for the Coalition Force and MiTT within their sector is the level to which they can facilitate cooperation between the IA and Iraqi police.

MP Squads. Along with contracted police trainers, these MP squads visit stations daily. They are tasked to improve and train the Iraqi police. They train the Iraqis on evidence collection and the systems that make a successful police force.

MP units will be critical in helping you to build the relationship between your IA battalion commander and the Iraqi police commander. Including these key MP players is important in facilitating IA and Iraqi police cooperation.

What makes this situation more complex is the requirement for each to trust each other, and trust among these players can be a limited resource. Some players even might exclude others actively when it comes to mission planning and information sharing.

For the IA to transition successfully into the lead and provide for a secure Iraq, all these players must work together. Facilitating this can be a daunting task. All five of these players have separate chains of command and, often, different agendas.

Relationships are central. As they say in real estate, the key is "Location, Location, Location." In dealing with

Iraqis, it is “Relationships, Relationships, Relationships.”

To illustrate this concept, see the figure. It shows how to build a healthy relationship with an Iraqi unit that leads to the unit’s trusting you and, ultimately, your integration into one team. It first begins with conveying respect.

Showing Respect. Iraqis are sensitive to being shown respect and quickly will sense a lack of respect. It is important that you do *not* make a poor first impression through an unintentional act of disrespect. You will not be able to mentor or coach the Iraqis if their leaders view you as lacking respect for them.

Likewise, you could get a few steps into the team-building process and have to start all over because of a simple act of disrespect. Here are a few pointers about showing respect.

Salutes. Salutes are rendered when approaching officers more senior than you. Because there is a strong British influence, the traditional “foot stomp” is rendered. To foot stomp, extend your right leg with your knee bent waist high and then smartly stomp the foot to the ground accompanied by a salute if you have headgear on (without a salute if you are not wearing headgear).

If you are the same rank as the commander, it is still customary to render

these honors to him—green tab (commander) is “trump.”

You do not have to go with the British approach, but you must render some kind of honors. This is their custom, and you will gain credibility as someone who knows what he is doing.

Greetings. Handshakes and smiles are important—the neutral face makes Iraqis think that you are angry or do not like them. As you get to know your counterparts better, hugs are not uncommon. If you are especially close, a kiss on the cheek may become commonplace. You will get used to it—it is a compliment indicating that your status has been raised to “brother.”

First Impressions. As indicated in the intro scenario, you may see things in your unit that you want to fix immediately. Do not rush to judgment; you must build credibility before your advice will be considered. If you just arrived and already are telling them what to do, you will be viewed as incredibly disrespectful.

Building Relationships. The next step in the process is working out the specific nature of your relationship. This only can be started once you have established respect for each other. Only then can you figure out how you are going to work with the members of the

unit. This encompasses everything from how you share battlespace to how you will share information.

You are here to put this organization in the lead so make sure they know who is in charge—they *are*. There is a huge temptation to act as a surrogate chain of command and dictate operations. This will be the approach during the developmental phases of these units, but never forget the goal: Iraqis in the lead.

It is like teaching someone to ride a bike. The goal is to get the training wheels off. You are the “training wheels.” Here are a few pointers.

Combined Operations. A good tool for maintaining a good relationship with your IA unit is to conduct combined operations. Our MiTT maintains a 24-hour combined tactical operations center (TOC). In addition, our Coalition Force unit conducts regular combined operations with the IA and stages quick-reaction forces from our Iraqi combat outpost. This gives the MiTT and Coalition Forces 24-hour-a-day exposure to our IA battalion everyday.

This team operational concept facilitates sharing vital information and dramatically has improved the speed and efficiency with which IA, MiTT and our Coalition Force unit react to changes in our battlespace.

Mentoring. Your approach should be mentoring and coaching. Remember, this is their unit, not yours.

If you make a recommendation and the Iraqis don’t accept it—move on. Choose your battles; if every operation becomes a point of contention as you fight to win your point, the Iraqis will view you as a pain to be endured. You also will damage your rapport with the Iraqis and their perception of your respect for them, pushing you back to step one: building respect. You must choose “bones of contention” carefully and approach the Iraqis with respect.

Attitude. Another technique for building relationship with the Iraqi unit is to be as positive as possible in public forums and reserve recommendations for improvement for private forums with the commander. The leader can’t afford to be viewed as failing—his popularity counts. If a leader is viewed as bad, his organization might suffer serious retention problems. You can’t afford to be the cause of those retention problems.

Establishing Trust. After you establish how your relationship will work, you will have to gain experience working together to build trust. You will have



Photo by SFC Michael Gullory, 982nd Combat Camera Company

A US Soldier and an Iraqi Army soldier clear the second floor of an Iraqi home during a cordon and search operation in Hawijah, Iraq, 11 November 2006. The Soldiers were looking for insurgents, unauthorized weapons and materials for constructing improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

credibility just by the fact that you are an American Soldier. But that won't earn you automatic trust. In this culture, trust has to be earned through experiences with each other, and that takes time. Here are a few things to consider.

Reporting. Regardless of what you are doing with the unit, there will be reporting requirements. You can't afford to be seen as a coalition spy who reports the IA unit for every minor mistake. The Iraqis understand that you must report without compromise such things as corruption and detainee abuse. But just like in American units, some things you keep in-house and fix yourselves.

If having you around is a sure way to get the unit attention for every minor blemish from its higher headquarters, you never will establish trust with your Iraqi counterpart.

Promises. Be careful what promises you make. If you promise something, you better deliver it. Conversely, promising things you know you can deliver will build trust and provide the very things your counterpart values from Americans—capabilities.

At this point, if you are successful at building trust, do not be surprised if you are invited to your counterpart's home for a social event; attend if you can. Iraqis are very social and value showing you who they are. Embrace them, and you will build trust.

Shared Danger. Nothing builds trust faster than facing the enemy together. Several times the IA battalion commander, US company commander and MiTT chief have been on the battlefield together in a Stryker and been mortared, struck by a suicide vehicle-borne improvised-explosive device (SVBIED) or had to clear houses together. The Middle Eastern culture values bravery and courage. A little shared danger buys a lot of trust.

The opposite is true as well. If you always monitor the battle from the TOC, the Iraqis will notice.

Building a Team. If you have been successful at these initial steps of showing respect, building relationships and establishing trust, you will start to notice some significant benefits that will yield concrete results. During this phase of the relationship, American and Iraqi units will start to work seamlessly. There will be fewer attempts by Americans to try to motivate Iraqis and more examples of the Iraqis motivating themselves.

The way this synthesis happens has nothing to do with what is *said* to the

Iraqis and everything to do with what is *shown* to them. Set the example.

Sanitation and "Police Calls." If you do not like how dirty the perimeter you share with the Iraqis is, set the example of cleanliness. The Iraqis will begin to emulate your example.

Caution: this takes time. You will feel like you are alone in some of your efforts. Then, one day, you will look up and an Iraqi will be next to you mopping as you clean out the combined TOC.

In our AO, the Stryker company first sergeant led his Soldiers through a police call of the motor pool where the Coalition Forces park their vehicles. Most of the trash was not caused by US Soldiers, and there were several why-are-we-picking-up-someone-else's-mess comments. However, after several iterations of police calls, the IA began to emulate the Coalition Force example, and regular police calls began to take place.

Uniform Standards. Maintaining these standards always will be a challenge. But show your Soldiers wearing body armor and helmets, and the Iraqis, ultimately, will follow your example.

Maintaining Patience. A great deal of patience is required throughout this process. This is a level of patience with which we American Soldiers are not familiar. For example, it is not uncommon to sit with your counterpart drinking *chai* (tea) for hours, just being together. This is time well spent.

Our Armies simply are different in how we approach things. In our Army, we are quick to assess problems and determine solutions. We are dedicated to expediency; we value efficiency in every operation we approach. We would have worked through many issues in the time required to exchange pleasantries with the Iraqis. The Iraqi approach is neither good nor bad but a reality.

You must be aware that our concept of time is not shared by your Iraqi counterpart. To be successful in your mission, you must operate in their environment without becoming frustrated and "losing your cool."

Work with your US counterparts behind closed doors to resolve those issues you know you can resolve. After deciding on how you need to coach or model the solution, then provide a united front to the IA battalion commander.

On occasion, your advice will be disregarded by the Iraqis who implement a different solution. View that as a good thing. When the IA unit accomplishes the mission, even if it's a bit rough

around the edges, it learns and gains confidence in its abilities. If you come into conflict with the Iraqi perspective, you will show disrespect and damage the relationship, causing you to start all over with building rapport.

This entire process will be frustrating only if you do not endeavor to understand the nature of the human terrain in which you are operating. Transitioning Iraqi units into the lead can be very fulfilling. Your first step is to embrace the human terrain in your Iraqi AO.

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